



SUB-COMMITTEE ON  
RADIOCOMMUNICATIONS AND SEARCH  
AND RESCUE  
4th session  
Agenda item 8.2

COMSAR 4/8/1  
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**MATTERS CONCERNING SEARCH AND RESCUE, INCLUDING THOSE  
RELATED TO THE 1979 SARCONFERENCE AND THE INTRODUCTION  
OF THE GMDSS**

**Routeing distress alerts**

**Note by the United States**

**SUMMARY**

**Executive summary:** The Sub-Committee and States are invited to take actions, as a matter of urgency, to complete the IMO SAR plan

**Action to be taken:** Paragraph 5

**Related documents:** IMO provisional SAR plan

1 The **IMO SAR Plan** is a tool intended to serve two very important purposes: it clarifies who is mainly responsible for co-ordinating and arranging for SAR services; and it provides a Plan for efficient distribution of distress alerts to responsible RCCs. Considering these purposes, the IMO SAR Plan should have been completed before the first element of GMDSS alerting equipment was installed aboard a vessel or craft at sea. The GMDSS is now fully implemented for SOLAS ships, but the IMO SAR Plan remains nearly non-existent. However, the Plan is still a fundamental necessity, and its development should be expedited if at all possible. This makes it necessary to review the procedures by which the Plan can be finalized.

2 What actually exists is the **Provisional SAR Plan**, complete after many years of nurturing by IMO. IMO cannot, however, recommend distribution of alerts in accordance with the Provisional SAR Plan, because the lines separating the SAR regions (SRRs) remain unendorsed by States due to their lack of formal SAR Agreements with States having neighbouring SAR regions. IMO is not in a position to answer a question at this time from COSPAS-SARSAT, Inmarsat or others on how to use the IMO SAR Plan or Provisional SAR Plan for their intended purposes - a question it should have been able to answer years ago. This is a very detrimental situation for SAR, not everywhere, but in much of the world. Unless something changes, additional decades will pass without completion of the IMO SAR Plan.

3 Pertinent provisions of the revised Annex to the SAR Convention read as follows:

*"2.1.3 To help ensure the provision of adequate shore-based communication infrastructure, efficient distress alert routeing, and proper operational co-ordination to effectively support search and rescue services, Parties shall, individually or in co-operation with other States, ensure that sufficient search and rescue regions are established within each sea area in accordance with*

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*paragraphs 2.1.4 and 2.1.5. Such regions should be contiguous and, as far as practicable, not overlap.*

*2.1.4 Each search and rescue region shall be established by agreement among Parties concerned. The Secretary-General shall be notified of such agreements.*

*2.1.5 In case agreement on the exact dimensions of a search and rescue region is not reached by the Parties concerned, those Parties shall use their best endeavours to reach agreement upon appropriate arrangements under which the equivalent overall co-ordination of search and rescue services is provided in the area. The Secretary-General shall be notified of such arrangements.*

*2.1.6 Agreement on the regions or arrangements referred to in paragraphs 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 shall be recorded by the Parties concerned, or in written plans accepted by the Parties."*

4 The United States urges consideration of possible options for making the IMO SAR Plan a reality in the fastest practicable way. Ideally, we support a process similar to the one used by ICAO (which has been discussed at COMSAR at previous meetings) for development and adoption of its Regional Air Navigation Plans. The ICAO procedures neither preclude formal agreements between States, nor do these procedures introduce the possibility of States being forced to accept arrangements with which they do not agree. These procedures do, however, enable adoption within just a few months of regional arrangements that are acceptable to the States concerned. We would like to know if this is a feasible option, and whether there may be other possibilities.

#### **Action requested of the Sub-Committee**

5 The Sub-Committee is invited to:

- .1 invite Governments to consider the proposal in paragraph 4 above;
- .2 invite Governments to consider what other options may be available to help expedite implementation of the critical safety provisions of the IMO SAR Plan; and
- .3 consider completion of the IMO SAR Plan as a matter of urgency.